

A further problematic area with watercraft, concerns "torque interrupt". Torque interrupt occurs when a transmission system is temporarily disengaged when the gear ratio of the transmission system is changed. One common example of torque interrupt occurs when a driver changes gear in a motor vehicle. Whilst it is acceptable to have torque interrupt in a motor car, since the momentum of the vehicle will keep the vehicle moving during the period when the transmission is temporarily disengaged, in a watercraft, torque interrupt is a more serious problem because the drag on a watercraft's hull is much greater than the frictional drag on a motor vehicle and the watercraft is appreciably slowed during any period when the transmission is disengaged.

A further problem which occurs with watercraft, is "clunking" which occurs as a watercraft is put into forward or reverse gear. Whilst it is not a serious problem from an operational point of view, clearly a person spending a large sum of money to buy a watercraft, particularly at the more expensive end of the market, might expect to get a transmission system which does not "clunk" when the craft is put into gear.

It is an object of the present invention to address or alleviate at least some of the problems of the prior art.

Any discussion of documents, acts, materials, devices, articles or the like which has been included in the present specification is solely for the purpose of providing a context for the present invention. It is not to be taken as an admission that any or all of these matters form part of the prior art base or were common general knowledge in the field relevant to the present invention as it existed before the priority date of each claim of this application.

Summary of the Invention

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a compact two speed transmission system for a marine craft comprising:

- an input shaft;
- an output shaft;
- a first gear train for connecting the input shaft to the output shaft for driving the same in a first gear;
- a second gear train connecting the input shaft to the output shaft for driving the output shaft in a second gear; and
- a clutch means for connecting the input shaft to the output shaft at a gear ratio other than one to one.

The output shaft and input shaft may be parallel and linked by gear trains for first and second gears.

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Alternatively, the output shaft and input shaft may be co-axial and linked via a lay shaft extending parallel to the input and output shafts.

Preferably the gear trains are selected to provide a higher gearing i.e. faster spinning of the lay shaft when the second clutch is engaged although an opposite
5 arrangement would be possible.

In a preferred embodiment a one way clutch means is incorporated in the first gear train so that when second gear is engaged first gear over-runs.

The clutch means may be a friction clutch

A further friction clutch means connecting first gear to the output shaft may be
10 provided.

The friction clutch or clutches may be located on the output shaft either between the first and second gears or with the first and second gears located between the clutches and the output end of the output shaft.

A control system may be provided for controlling the first and second clutches.
15 Amongst other inputs, the control system may receive inputs from various sensors including clutch pressure sensors, sensors measuring the speed of the input shaft and output shafts respectively and sensors providing information relating to the position of gears in the gear trains.

One or more control valves and electro-hydraulic solenoids may be used to
20 provide controlled clutch slip for docking and other functions where very low speeds of the order of a few knots may be desired.

The control system may also be used to control the solenoid to allow slipping of the clutch when initiating movement of the watercraft to avoid the problem of "clunking" as the boat is put into, or taken out of, gear.

25 In a second aspect of the present invention there is provided a two speed transmission system including a first clutch means for connecting an input shaft to a co-axial output shaft;

a lay shaft typically parallel to the input and output shafts;

a first gear train for connecting the input shaft to the lay shaft for driving the
30 same via the input shaft;

a second gear train connecting the lay shaft to the output shaft;

wherein the first clutch means connects the input shaft to the output shaft; and

a second clutch means connects the input shaft to the output shaft via the lay shaft giving a gear ratio other than one to one.

Preferably the gear trains are selected to provide a higher gearing ie faster spinning of the lay shaft when the second clutch is engaged although an opposite arrangement would be possible.

Using the present invention the problem of torque interrupt may be overcome by
5 operating the transmission so that the first clutch is disengaged simultaneously with the engagement of the second clutch and vice versa.

A control system may be provided for controlling the first and second clutches. Amongst other inputs, the control system may receive inputs from various sensors including clutch pressure sensors, sensors measuring the speed of the input shaft and
10 output shafts respectively and sensors providing information relating to the position of gears in the gear trains.

One or more control valves and electro-hydraulic solenoids may be used to provide controlled clutch slip for docking and other functions where very low speeds of the order of a few knots may be desired.

15 The control system may also be used to control the solenoid to allow slipping of the clutch when initiating movement of the watercraft to avoid the problem of "clunking" as the boat is put into, or taken out of, gear.

Transmissions embodying the various aspects of the present invention may be used in a watercraft particularly, but not exclusively in a stern drive unit.

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Brief Description of the Drawings

A specific embodiment of the present invention will now be described by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram of the stern of a watercraft having a stern drive
25 transmission of the type that is commonly referred to as a bravo type in the art;

Figure 2 is a schematic diagram of a first stern drive transmission embodying the present invention for the watercraft of Figure 1;

Figure 3 repeats the diagram of Figure 2 with a control system superposed on the diagram;

30 Figure 4 is a schematic diagram of a second stern drive transmission embodying the present invention;

Figure 5 repeats the diagram of Figure 4 with a control system superposed on the diagram; and

Figure 6 is a schematic diagram of the stern of a watercraft having a stern drive
35 transmission of the type that is commonly referred to as an alpha type in the art; and

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Figure 7 is a schematic diagram of a two-speed transmission having a single clutch in which the output gears are located close to the output of the transmission;

Figure 8 shows a two-speed transmission with a single clutch in which the clutch is located close to the output;

5 Figure 9 shows a two-speed transmission with dual clutches with the output gears located at the output end of the shaft;

Figure 10 shows a two-speed transmission having two clutches on which the clutch is located near the output end of the transmission; and

10 Figure 11 illustrates the position of the transmission relative to a swim platform on a marine craft.

Detailed Description of a Preferred Embodiment

Referring to the drawings, Figure 1 shows the stern of a watercraft 10 having a hull 12. A stern drive unit 16 incorporating a dual clutch automated manual
15 transmission 18 is located behind the transom 20 of the watercraft, an engine (not shown) is located inside the hull and an output shaft 22 from the engine projects generally horizontally from the stern of the watercraft provides power to the stern drive unit 16. This type of marine propulsion system is also commonly referred to as an "inboard/outboard drive".

20 The output shaft of the watercraft 22 spins about a generally horizontal axis. A bevel gear 24 is fixed to the distal end of the output shaft. The bevel gear 24 defined at the end of the output shaft meshes with forward and reverse bevel gears 26, 28 respectively and a dog clutch 30 (or similar device such as a cone clutch, friction clutch, or the like) moves in the direction of arrow "A" to connect a vertical output
25 shaft 32 with the forward bevel gear 26, or in the direction "B" to connect the vertical output shaft 32 with the reverse bevel gear 28. A lower part 34 of the vertical output shaft is operatively connected to a further pair of meshing bevel gears 36, 38 which convert the vertical axis movement of the output shaft 34 to a generally horizontal shaft 40 driving a propeller or propellers 42. The above arrangement is typical of existing
30 marine stern drive systems and is commonly known by some companies as a "Bravo" type drive. The present invention is concerned with a transmission system and control means which not only provide two speed drive for the watercraft but also provide a number of other advantages over existing marine transmission systems.

35 Figure 2, shows a first transmission 18 embodying the present invention in more detail. Instead of being directly coupled to the lower bevel gear 36 as in most existing stern drives, the vertical output shaft 32 (which is the input shaft for the transmission

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18) is connected via a first friction clutch 44 to a co-axial lower output shaft 46. When the first clutch is engaged the lower output shaft 46 spins at the same rate as the vertical output shaft 32. A second friction clutch 48 is also provided. When the second friction clutch is engaged, a lay shaft 56 is driven via components 52, 54 which in turn drives the lower output shaft 46 via gears 57 and 58. In the described embodiment, the gearing has been selected to provide a higher gearing i.e. faster spinning of the lower shaft 46 when the second clutch is engaged, however this is not necessarily the case in all embodiments and the gears may be used as overdrive or underdrive. Forward and reverse is still selected by the bevel gearing and dog clutch 30 (or similar device) the head of the output shaft, so the system can provide two speeds in both forward and reverse directions.

A control system illustrated in Figure 3 is provided for controlling the dual clutches. The control system includes an electronic control unit (ECU) 60 linked to various sensors including sensors providing information to the ECU regarding the position/pressure of the clutches. The system also includes sensors 62 and 64 measuring the speed of the input shaft and output shafts respectively and sensors 66 providing information about the position of the gears, sensors 68 providing information about the engine's throttle position, and sensors 70 providing information concerning the temperature of the systems hydraulic fluid. Alternatively, some of this information can be collected off the common vessel/engine BUS or CAN.

The control system controls the output speed through control of piston pressure via an electrical signal sent to the electro hydraulic solenoid 82. The system may receive electronic requests for the various modes that the system operates such as docking, trolling, hi-launch energy, from any suitable input means such as buttons, levers, radio controls or the like.

Figure 3 also shows a valve body 80 containing a control valve and an electro-hydraulic solenoid 82 (more than one may be used) to activate controlled clutch slip as described in more detail below. The pressure of the solenoid 82 can also be fed to the ECU. Figure 3 also illustrates a hydraulic pump 84 used for maintaining hydraulic pressure in the system's hydraulic controls.

The control system is arranged to allow slipping of the clutch to avoid the problem of "clunking" as the boat is put into, or taken out of, gear. The dog clutch (or similar device) will engage the input shaft with either the forward or reverse bevel gear, and the output shaft disengaged. The control system is arranged to gradually apply the clutch using an electro-hydraulic solenoid to smoothly transfer power from the input shaft to the output shaft.

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The system of clutch slipping may also be used for docking functions where very low speeds of the order of a few knots may be desired and wherein clutch slip may be used to dissipate excess rotational speed of the output shaft to allow slower movement of the boat whilst maintaining engine speed. In addition, the control of slip speed allows the clutch to slip at any speed or torque which achieves high energy launches and also protects the driveline of a marine craft when the craft's propeller contacts obstacles such as the sea bed, branches, rocks, or the like.

The problem of torque interrupt is overcome by operating the transmission so that the first clutch is disengaged simultaneously with the engagement of the second clutch and vice versa, when the boat is moving.

Figures 4 and 5 illustrate a variant 18a of the transmission of Figures 2 and 3. Components which are common to both embodiments have the same reference numerals. In the transmission 18a a one way clutch 100 is provided between the lay shaft 56 and the input shaft 32. This gives the advantage of a smooth gearshift without having to time a clutch swap since the one way clutch will either grab or let go depending on which gear is selected. The disadvantage of this is that reverse gear may be operated in the lower gear only. In this embodiment the control system is connected to the common vessel/engine BUS or CAN 110

Figure 6 illustrates the system in use with an "alpha" type drive instead of the bravo "type" drive shown in Figure 1. In this case the output shaft 24 is directly connected to input shaft 32 via bevel gears 24 and 28 and forward and reverse are provided at the lower end of the drive adjacent the propeller 40 selected via a dog clutch 120 or similar means.

Although the system described above incorporates two wet clutches, it would be appreciated that dry clutches could also be substituted for the wet clutches.

Figure 7 shows a further embodiment of a marine transmission, in this case, a single clutch automated manual transmission 101. As in the case in the previously described transmission, this transmission is also shown as part of an inboard/outboard marine drive.

The output shaft of the watercraft, not shown, spins about a generally horizontal axis and is coaxial with and drives the input shaft 102 of the transmission which is mounted on bearings 103. The output shaft 104 of the marine transmission, is supported on bearings 105 parallel to and spaced from the input shaft 102.

A bevel gear 106 defined at the output end 104a of the output shaft 104 meshes with forward and reverse bevel gears 108, 110, respectively and a dog clutch 112 (or similar device) moves in a vertical direction to connect a vertical output shaft 114 with

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either the reverse bevel gear 110 or the forward bevel gear 108, or vice versa depending on whether a right hand or left hand propeller is fitted.

The selection of forward or reverse motion for the marine craft direction of the propeller is carried out by the dog clutch 112 after the output of the marine
5 transmission and therefore the input and output shafts of the marine transmission, always rotate in the same sense, and the transmission 101 is not required to cope with rotation of the input or output shafts in more than one direction.

As is standard in the art, a lower part of the vertical output shaft, not shown, is operatively connected to a further pair of meshing bevel gears, which convert the
10 vertical axis movement of the vertical output shaft 114 to a generally horizontal axis movement of a horizontal shaft driving a propeller.

A gear wheel 120, for first gear is mounted on the output shaft 104 and this in turn, meshes with gear wheel 122 incorporating a one-way clutch mounted on the input shaft 102. A gear wheel 124 for second gear and an associated clutch 126, is mounted
15 on the output shaft adjacent the first gear and on the opposite side of first gear 120 to the output end 104a of the output shaft. The second gear meshes 124 with a gear wheel 128 mounted on the input shaft adjacent the one-way clutch 122.

When the clutch is not engaged, which is the default condition so that the marine craft is able to travel in first gear in the event of failure of the clutch, the input shaft
20 drives the output shaft via first gear 120 which is used for docking and low speed manoeuvring. Gears rotate and slip occurs across first clutch pack. The main part of the clutch 126 rotates with the output shaft.

When the clutch 126 is engaged, second gear is engaged, and the clutch 126 and second gear turn with the output shaft. First gear 120 is forced to rotate at the same
25 speed as the same angular speed as second gear 124 and the one-way clutch 122 over runs.

In contrast with existing marine transmissions it will be appreciated that it is a relatively simple matter to change gear ratios by simply replacing two gear wheels, or four gear wheels if both first and second ratios are to be changed (although second is
30 normally 1:1).

A further advantage is that the drive requires only one clutch to provide the two different gears and can therefore be more compact.

The transmission incorporates a control system including an electronic control 130, hydraulic pump 132 and sensors of the same type that are described in relation to
35 the previously described embodiments.

Figure 8 shows a similar arrangement to that which is shown in Figure 7 except that in this arrangement the relative positions of the first 104 and second 126 gear wheels are reversed on the input and output shafts and the clutch is located adjacent the output end of the output shaft. This arrangement has the advantage that it makes the overall transmission shorter at the top, and helps to ensure that the transmission can clear the swim platform, as is discussed in more detail below with reference to Figure 11. In Figure 8, and in the subsequently described embodiments components which are common to the embodiment of Figure 7 carry the same reference numerals.

Figures 9 and 10 illustrate two-speed marine transmissions incorporating two clutches. As shown in Figure 9 the input shaft 150, again extends parallel to and is spaced apart from the output shaft 152 and the output end 152a of the output shaft is again connected to a bevel gear and dog clutch arrangement for driving a boat's propeller via a vertical shaft, in a similar arrangement to what is described for the transmissions of Figures 7 and 8.

The input shaft 150 is connected to the output shaft 152 via first gear 154 and second gear 156. First gear meshes with gear wheel 158 which includes a one-way clutch. Second gear 156 meshes with gear wheel 160. Friction clutch 162 and 164 are provided for engaging second and first gears respectively.

When second gear is engaged using clutch 162, the one-way clutch over runs and first gear 154 simply spins. In second gear, the first gear and the clutch associated with the first gear, do not rotate so that there is no drag in second gear which is the gear used most of the time.

This arrangement provides a number of advantages over existing marine drives including such as are described above in connection with the embodiments shown in Figures 1 to 6 by using electro-pneumatic or electro-hydraulic solenoids to control the friction clutch. The arrangement is not counter rotational sensitive since the forward and reverse choice is made after the end of the output shaft 152a.

An alternative arrangement is shown in Figure 10. In this version, the two clutch packs are located on the opposite side of the gears, in between the gears and the output of the output shaft. Compared to the arrangement of Figure 10, Figure 9 is shorter at the top. This arrangement makes the overall transmission shorter at the top. When the stern drive is not in use, it is raised out of the water, but there is a swim platform that the drive must clear. This design being shorter at the top axis allows more room for clearing the swim platform. Turning to Figure 11, the transmission and propeller assembly 200 may be lifted out of the water by rotating the assembly in a clockwise direction, indicated by arrow A. The top of the assembly 202 moves towards

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the rear of the boat and the rear 204 moves towards the swim platform 206. The shorter the transmission is, the less likely it is to interfere with the swim platform.

Also, the one way clutch is provided on the first gear 154 on the output shaft rather than the meshing gear wheel 158 on the input shaft. With this arrangement, the
5 output shaft will rotate faster in second and then over run the one way clutch at the differential speed of the first gear ratio.

Further, although the system is described as being incorporated in the stern drive unit of an inboard/outboard marine propulsion system, it will be appreciated that the system could also be incorporated in outboard systems where the engine and
10 transmission systems are all located behind the transom due to its compact size and light weight. It could also be used in variations of shaft drive v-drive, jet drive and surface drive marine propulsion systems between the engine and the propeller.

The transmission may also be used in non-marine applications where size, cost and weight are an issue such as in fork-lift or industrial transmissions.

15 It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that numerous variations and/or modifications may be made to the invention as shown in the specific embodiments without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention as broadly described. The present embodiments are, therefore, to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive.

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CLAIMS:

1. A two speed transmission system for a marine craft comprising:
an input shaft;
an output shaft,
5 a first gear train for connecting the input shaft to the output shaft for driving the same in a first gear;
a second gear train connecting the input shaft to the output shaft for driving the output shaft in a second gear; and
a clutch means for connecting the input shaft to the output shaft at a gear ratio
10 other than one to one.
2. A two speed transmission system as claimed in claim 1 wherein the output shaft and input shaft are parallel and linked by gear trains for first and second gears.
3. A two speed transmission system as claimed in claim 1 wherein, the output shaft and input shaft are co-axial and linked via a lay shaft extending parallel to the input and
15 output shafts.
4. A two speed transmission system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein a one way clutch means is incorporated in the first gear train such that when second gear is engaged first gear over-runs.
5. A two speed transmission system as claimed in any preceding claim including a
20 further friction clutch means connecting first gear to the output shaft.
6. A two speed transmission system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the clutch means is located on the output shaft either between the first and second gears.
7. A two speed transmission system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the first and second gears are located between the clutches and the output end of the output
25 shaft.
8. A two speed transmission system including a first clutch means for connecting an input shaft to a co-axial output shaft;
a lay shaft typically arranged parallel to the input and output shafts;
a first gear train for connecting the input shaft to the lay shaft for driving the
30 same via the input shaft;
a second gear train connecting the lay shaft to the output shaft;
wherein the first clutch means connects the input shaft to the output shaft; and
a second clutch means connects the input shaft to the output shaft via the lay shaft giving a gear ratio other than one to one.

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9. A two speed transmission system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the gear trains are selected to provide a higher gearing of the lay shaft when the second clutch is engaged.
10. A two speed transmission system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 8 wherein the gear trains are selected to provide a lower gearing of the lay shaft when the second clutch is engaged.
11. A two speed transmission system as claimed in any one of claims 5 or 8 to 11 further including a control system for controlling the first and second clutches.
12. A two speed transmission system as claimed in claim 11 further including sensors for supplying information to the control system, the sensors including one or more of clutch pressure sensors, sensors measuring the speed of the input shaft and output shafts respectively and sensors providing information relating to the position of gears in the gear trains.
13. A two speed transmission system as claimed in claim 11 further including one or more control valves and electro-hydraulic solenoids to provide controlled clutch slip for docking and other functions where very low speeds of the order of a few knots may be desired.
14. A watercraft incorporating a two speed transmission system as claimed in any preceding claim.
15. A watercraft as claimed in claim 14 wherein the transmission is incorporated as part of a stern drive unit.

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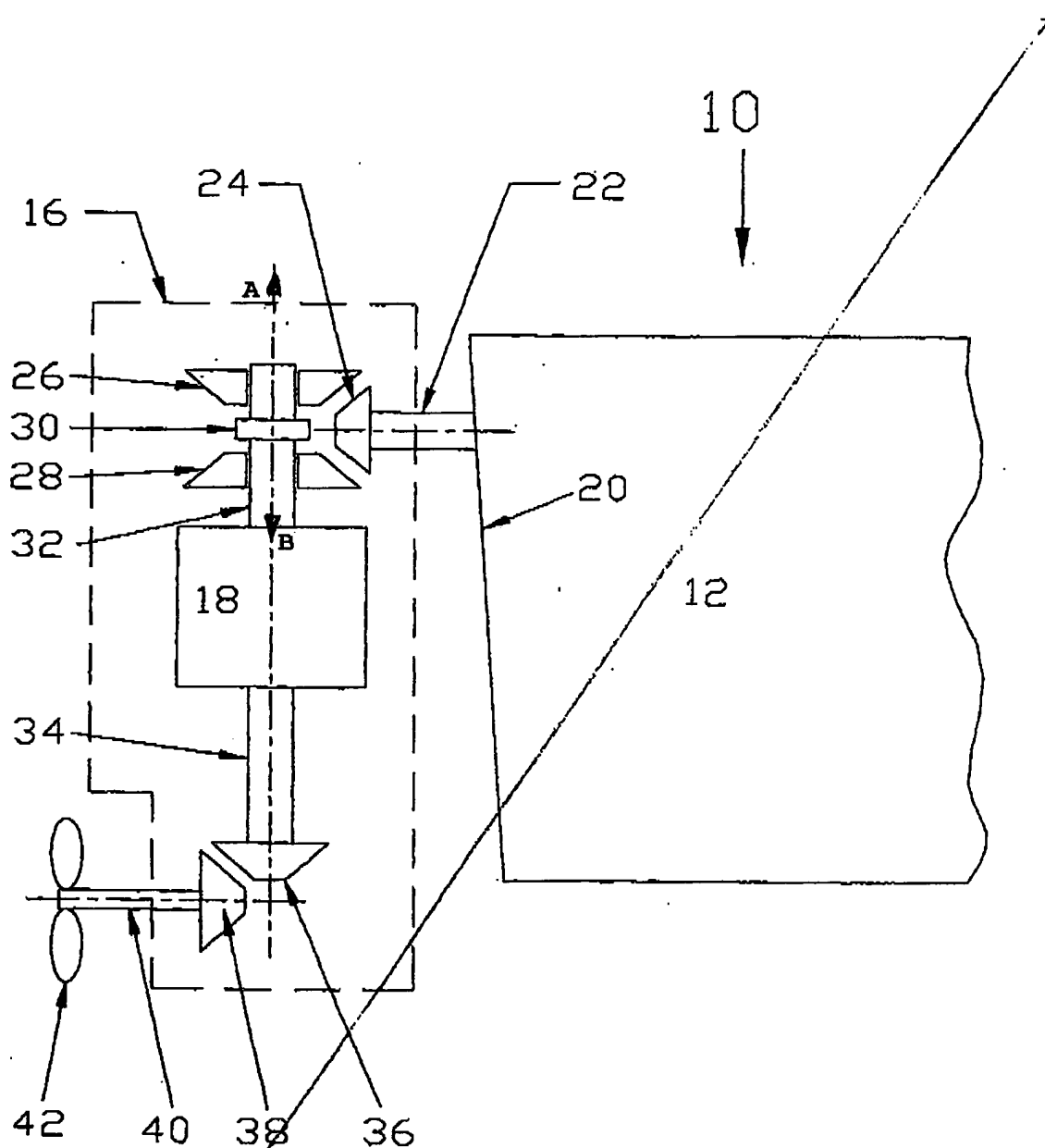


Figure 1

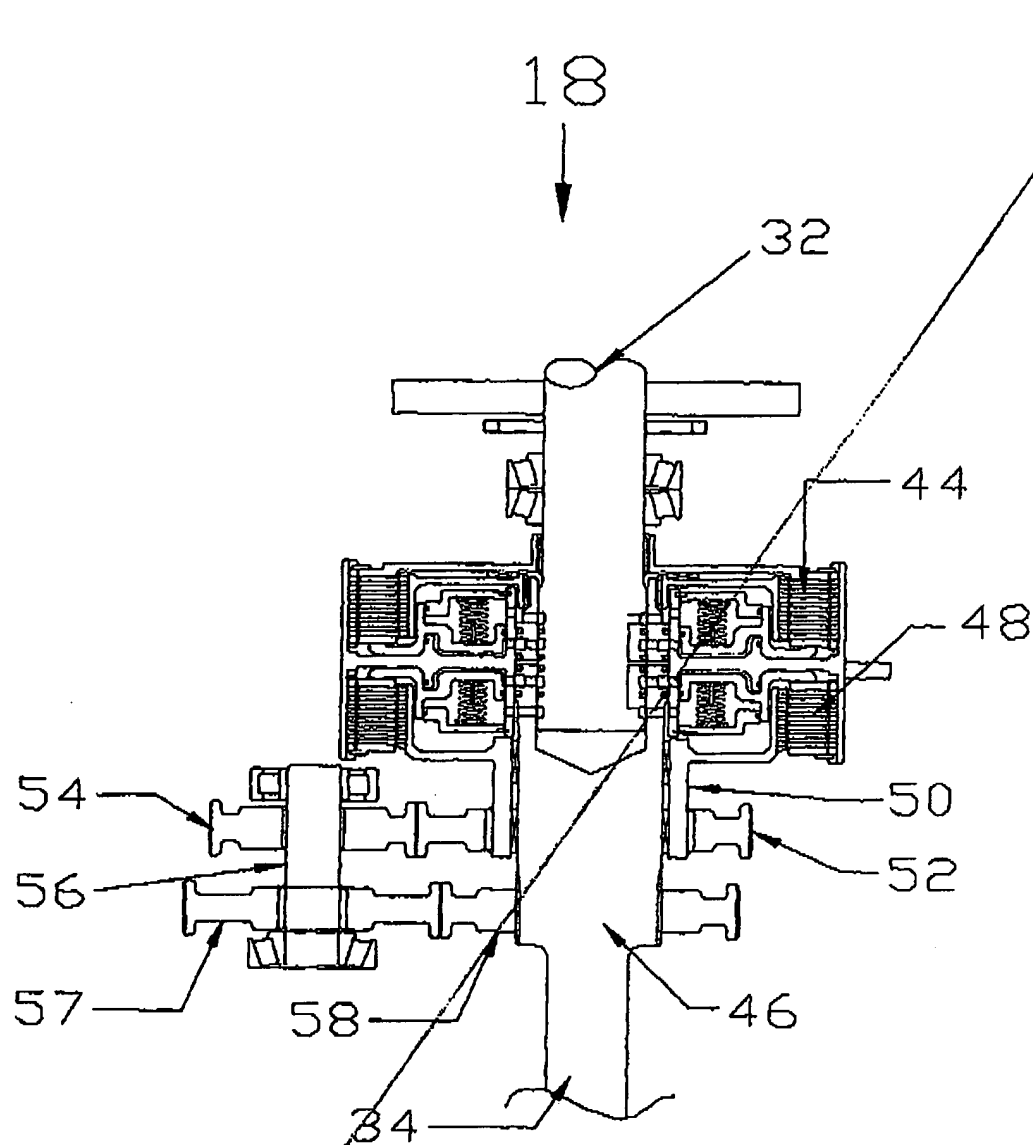


Figure 2

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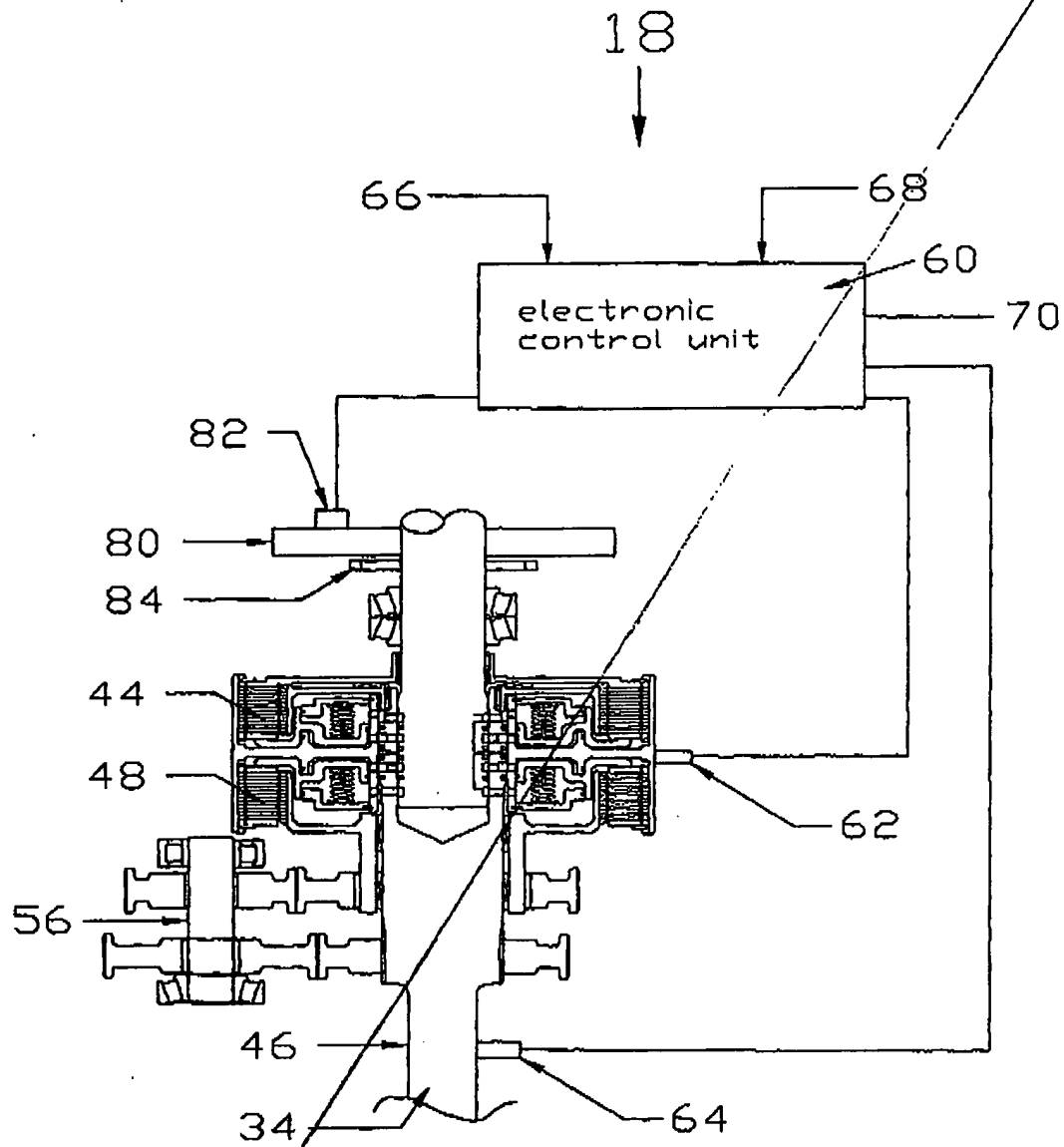


Figure 3

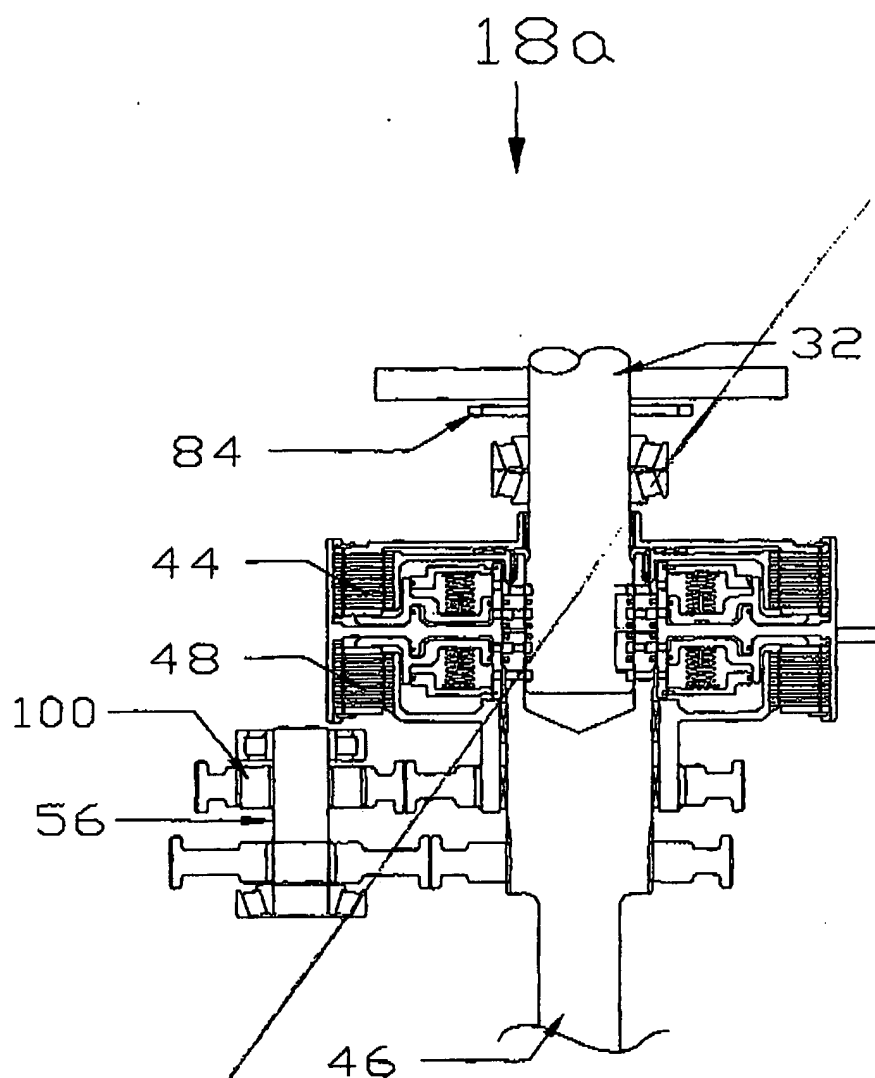


Figure 4

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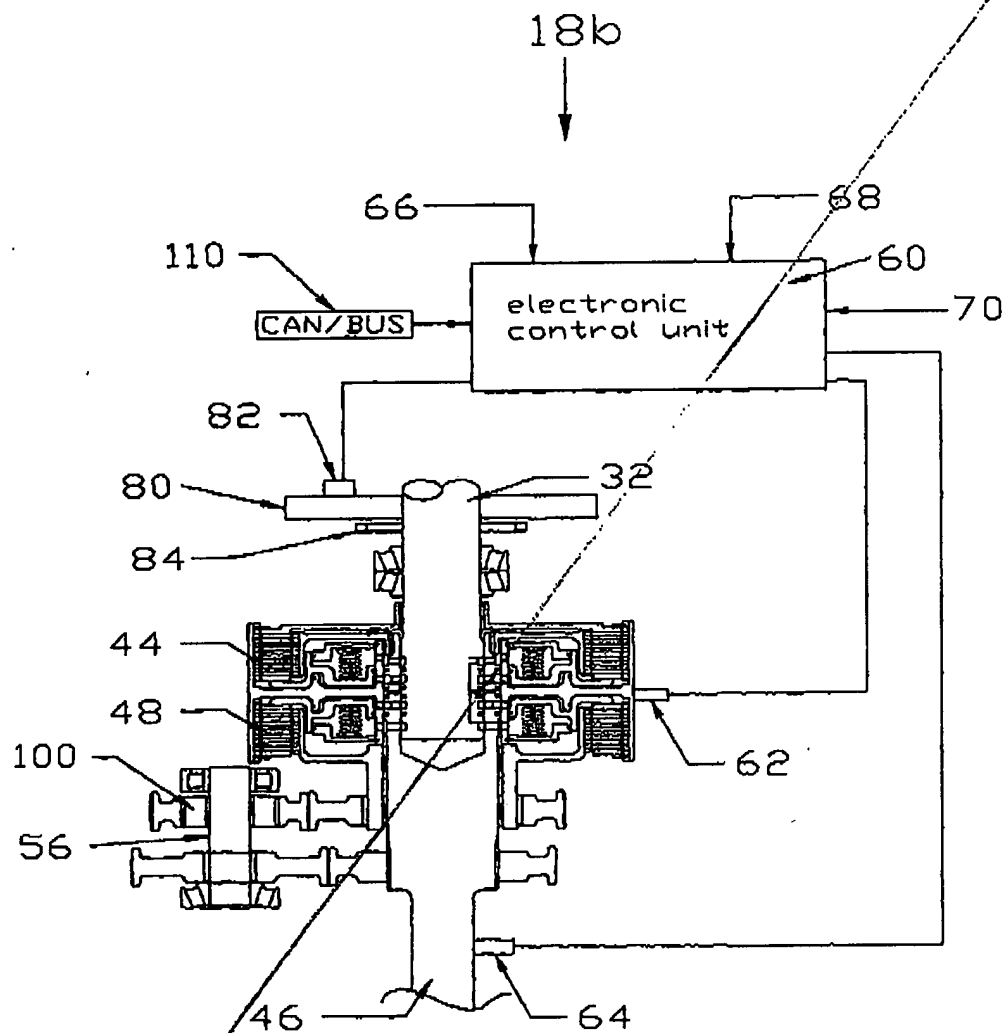


Figure 5

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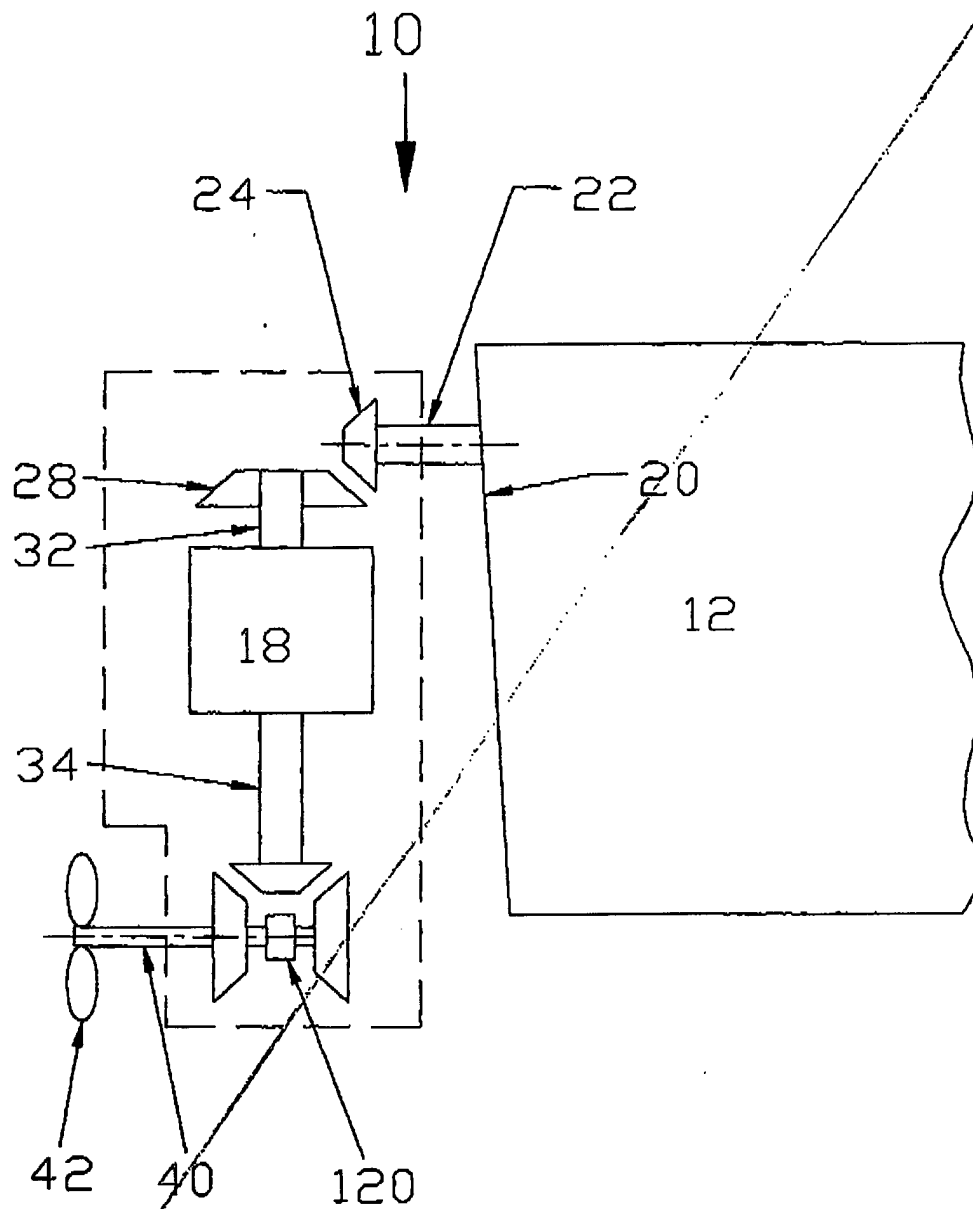


Figure 6

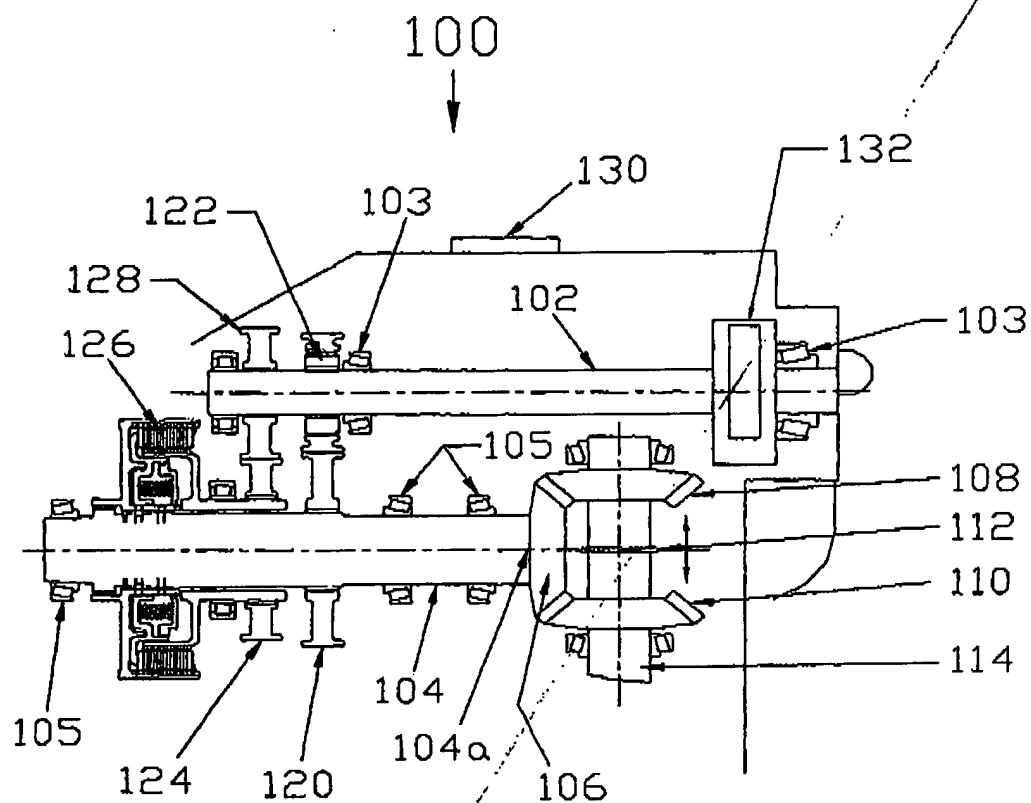


Figure 7

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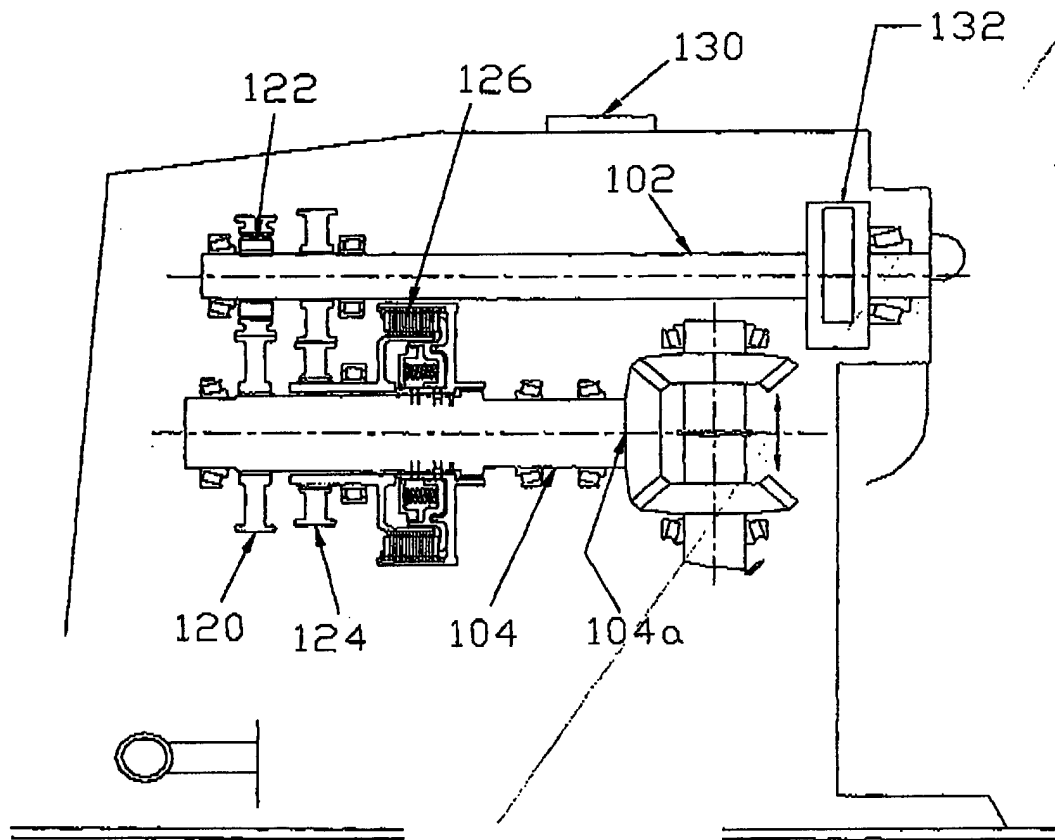


Figure 8

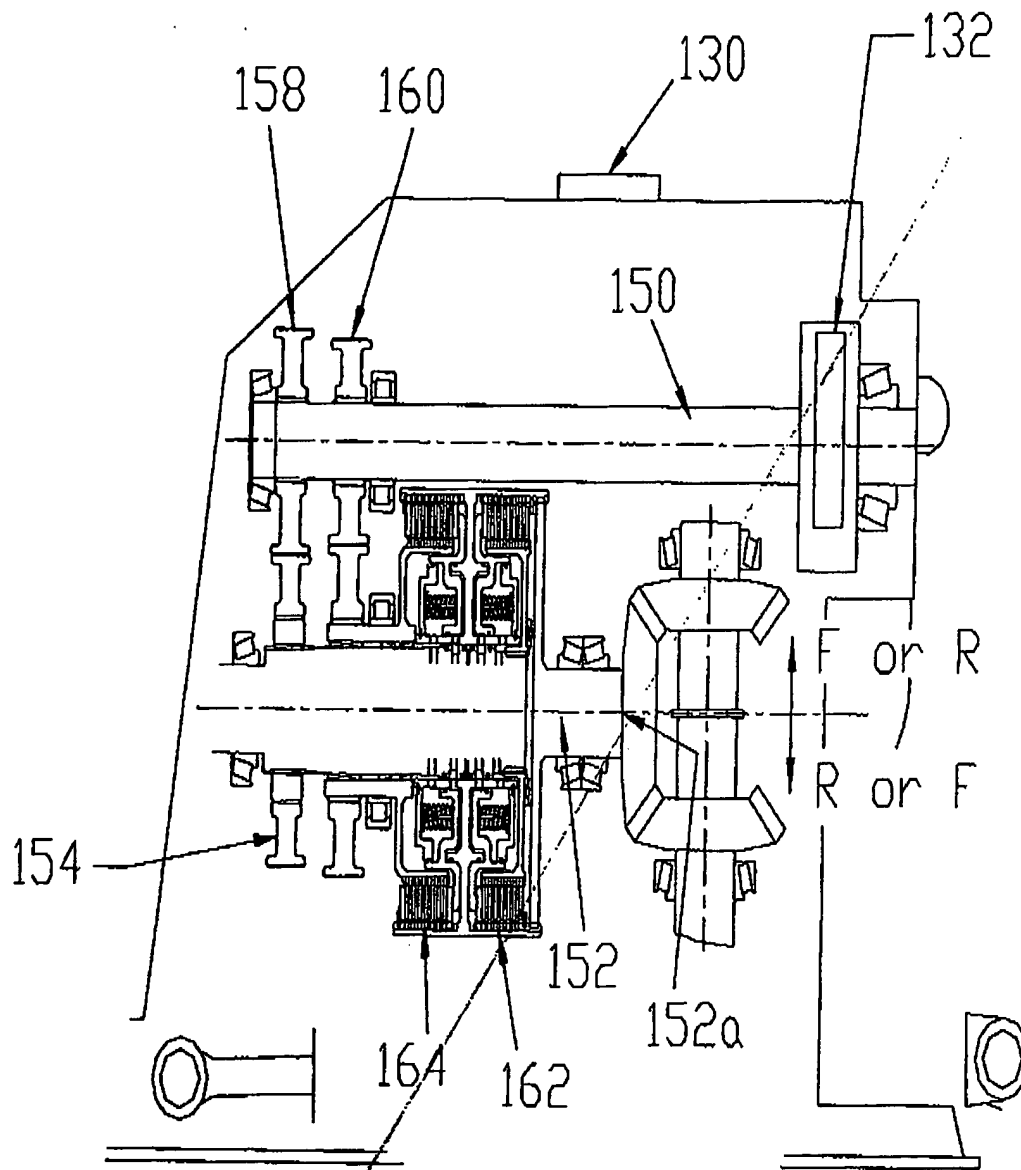


Figure 10

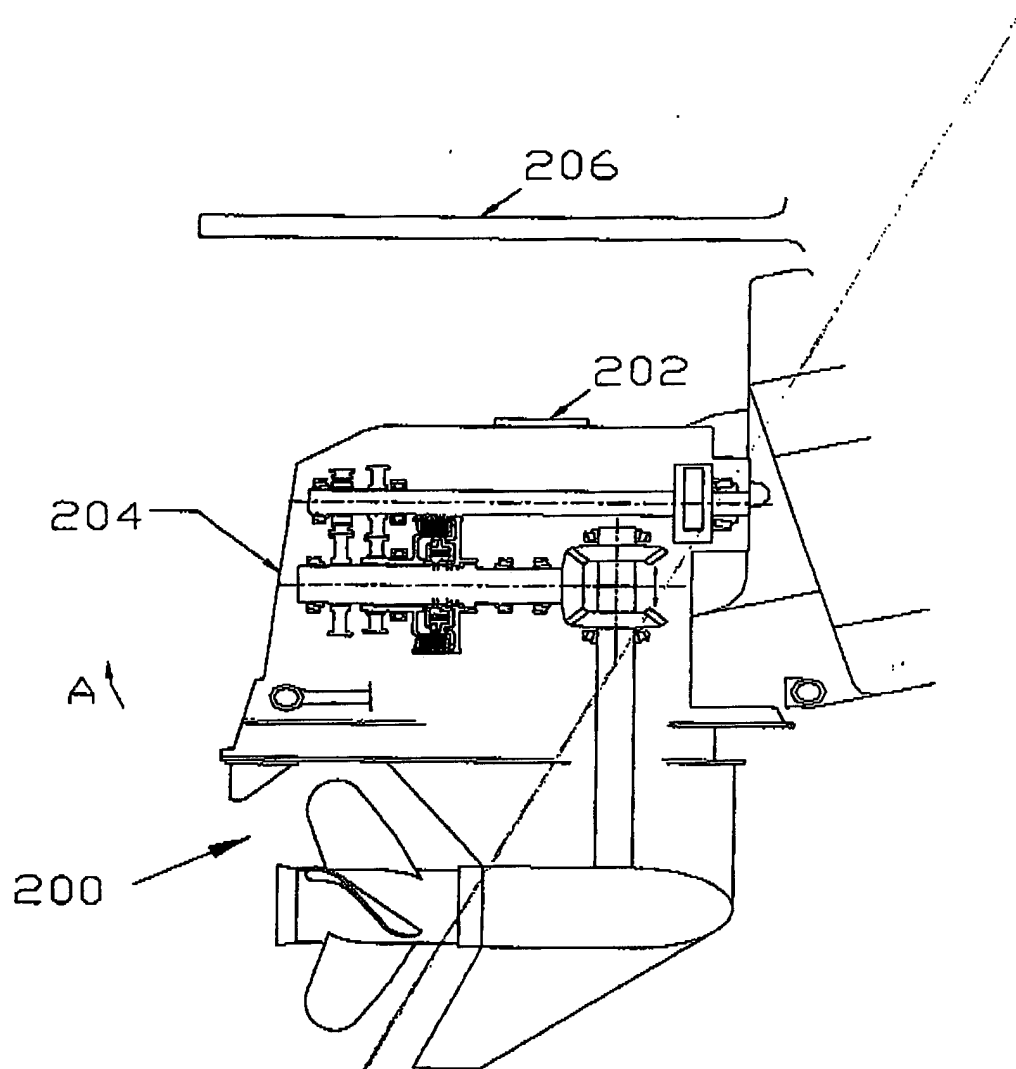


Figure 11

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